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Designed for the inexperienced language teacher, this summary of effective language teaching techniques is based on observations made in high school French classes, but is applicable also to elementary school and beginning college language programs. Consideration is given to maintaining interest and classroom control, using realia, and giving each student the same opportunity for class participation. Listed are teaching aids and techniques to help students communicate in the target language, including brief suggestions about teaching the cultural context, pattern drills, chorus responses, correction of errors, new word explanations, and grammar examples. (DS)

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Toward Better Classroom Teaching

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FOR several years now, I have been visiting so many modern language classes, and worked with so many teachers-in-training and new full-time teachers that I have collected quite an array of observations which have highlighted little lacunae that have a habit of cropping up in too many classes, details of which many may not be aware, but which lessen classroom efficiency and prevent first-rate pedagogy. A handy check list of some of these findings may prove useful to the profession, as a guide to fledgling teachers, as a check on those still comparatively inexperienced in the classroom, and as an aid to busy department heads and supervisors in appraising those who work under them. There is nothing new or original here, and the experienced teachers will discover nothing startling. What follows is almost entirely limited to high school classrooms in French, although I have evaluated some foreign language elementary school classes and occasionally one in Spanish. What applies to the secondary school is equally applicable to the primary school and to college beginning language courses. I trust that my colleagues in the other modern languages will be able to adapt what I cite to their respective fields. I might also add that all but a very few of the classes visited have been conducted almost entirely in the target language. I have seen little translation, and only rarely the type of language teaching so characteristic of the nineteen twenties and thirties, with the sole aim preparation for the old-style three-hour examination of the College Entrance Examination Board. Too many of those I have seen in action were not sufficiently at home in the foreign language to handle the techniques in use, but almost never did I find one who did not deserve commendation for effort. Parenthetically, I can only hope that all states will soon insist that foreign language teachers meet the standards of the new Modern Language Association proficiency tests. But that is beyond the scope of the present article.

I well remember some thirty years ago, when I was an apprentice teacher, my very excellent mentor telling me that the first rule upon embarking on a teaching career was to stand in class, and it is a commandment I have always followed. If some of those who remain seated behind their desks in the front of the room had seen what I have observed from my position in the rear they would quickly change their ways. The amount of doodling, note-passing and preparation for other courses which takes place in the back rows of too many classrooms would be a rude surprise to many otherwise quite competent teachers. I cannot stress too emphatically the necessity that the teacher be in entire control of his class, to know at all times what is going on, to be aware of those who pay attention and those who do not, to teach, in other words, to the entire room and not only to the happy(?) few who find themselves immediately beneath his not so eagle eye. Especially for young teachers, and they are the worst offenders in this, the psychological advantages of standing cannot be exaggerated.

The second thing which needs to be stressed is the necessity of keeping the class going, not to allow it to come to a total stop. Nothing is so unproductive in a language classroom as silence, seconds and even minutes when the teacher is not teaching, nor the students reciting. Even when these pauses are as short as thirty seconds, they can seem an eternity to the visitor. The momentum which has been built up, often after so much effort on the teacher's part, suddenly halts, the class begins to get restless, attentions wander. Then the whole edifice must be built anew, and it takes even more effort and talent a second time. No teacher should come into a classroom without a plan for the day's work. Never should he have to pause and try to figure out what to do next. But, and this is all important, he must not be a slave to his schedule. Often he will be unable to finish it, for answers will come slower than anticipated, or something will prove difficult for one or more of the class to grasp and demand extra drill. The teacher must, in such circumstances, be ready to stop where he is, forget what he had hoped to cover. Better that less

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be understood than cover an arbitrary amount of material merely for the sake of covering it. And the converse can happen too. The class will proceed faster than expected and all that was planned will be adequately covered with minutes still remaining. In such circumstances, the teacher must have something up his sleeve, something which he can take up without anyone being aware he has gone ahead.

There are many things which slow to a disturbing degree the pace of the class. I have seen teachers, after the bell has rung, distribute corrected exercises, walking up and down so that the youngsters receive the papers in the order in which they happen to be. Either the teacher should put each child's paper on his desk before the bell rings, or he should arrange them in such a way that they come out in the order of the seating, so that precious minutes are not wasted while he walks back and forth. Also, and again before the class starts, the blackboard should be cleaned so that he will not be forced, when he wishes to write on it, to stop all proceedings in order to erase. It is not so much the loss of the ten or fifteen seconds needed for that particular operation, but the break in the continuity, the interruption of the invisible but valuable currents which pass back and forth in the well-directed classroom. And for the same reason any realia that the teacher thinks will be used should be ready at hand. It is incredible how many times I have seen things come to a halt while the teacher looks through desk drawers or handbag to find the gadget which could so easily have been placed close at hand.

There is one danger concerning realia which I should like to mention. Their use can be overdone. I remember one class which I watched in open-mouth amazement because of the muscular activity of the charming, far from robust young girl who was teaching it. The word she was planning to illustrate was *devant*, as easy a word to explain without recourse to English as you can find. But the poor child had in her classroom an exceedingly heavy desk chair which she proceeded to lug about, placing it just before the desk, then in front of a child in the first row, next to the door, and finally at the blackboard. I wondered, and I am sure her pupils did too, why she didn't place herself in those positions, and leave the chair be. In addition to all the unnecessary toil and sweat, it took her so long to move the piece of furniture that there was a total and complete cessation of all other activity.

I seem to be returning continually to a point which I find of prime importance, this keeping the class afloat. Another of my pet aversions is a teacher's indecision on whom to call. He asks a question. Four or five enthusiastic, snapping hands are raised. Then pause, while he makes up his mind which of the eager beavers to recognize. It almost seems, sometimes, as if he were playing a mental "eenie-meenie-minie-moe" before choosing. Why? I always ask. What difference does it make? Far more important is to call on one immediately, and keep that precious flame alive. And then there is the teacher who asks a question and no hands are raised. It is fairly obvious, even from the back of the room, that no one is going to. There are times when you feel that in a few seconds, someone may. But at others there is a sort of silence indicative of total ignorance. Then the teacher should either ask one of his better students, who might if called upon be able to offer something, or else explain the answer himself, and then go on to drill this particular concept. Again, anything to keep things going. Anything but a gimmick which I find highly offensive, the repeating of questions more and more loudly, as though screaming would make them more understandable, the same technique as screaming English at foreigners when they fail to understand when it is spoken in normal tones.

Perhaps the technique which younger teachers have the most trouble mastering is that of what I might call "equal time to all." It is incredible how, in far more than a majority of classes, one-quarter of the group will get one-half the questions, and another quarter none at all. It is obvious, I should think, that in any class where you are trying to teach youngsters to speak, each is entitled to the same amount of opportunity. How often I have pointed this out to the teacher, only to be told I am quite wrong, that he does have a system, and knows each is called upon the same number of times. At my next visit, I keep a box score, checking the number of recitations of each of the class, and the teacher is invariably surprised at the discrepencies. At a recently visited class,

freshman level, two students were called on twenty-seven times, two others not at all. And this was a class in French CONVERSATION. Indeed some system must be devised, and one which will not allow the child to know when his turn is coming. Personally, I use cards, one for each member of the class, and I shuffle them frequently so that no one knows whether or not he will be next. It is the only way to be sure of this equality, and it demands no additional effort on the part of the already busy teacher.

I can go on indefinitely with these do's and don't's, everyone of which crops up over and over again. The teacher should at all times speak so that all in the room can hear. What are those in the back row going to do when he carries on in little more than a whisper a dialogue with someone up front. And he must get his pupils to speak up, so those not seated close can still profit by their answers. The teacher must not succumb to the professional disease of loquacity, for how can the youngsters learn to talk if the teacher monopolizes the conversation. First and second year language courses are not supposed to be lectures.

Don't keep looking at your watch. It is important in many instances to know the amount of time left, but try not to be so obvious that you examine your timepiece. The young are restless enough towards the end of the hour without the contagion of having the teacher look at the time!

When you are teaching out of a book, don't have your eyes so riveted to its pages that you are unaware of your surroundings, and not even looking at the child on whom you are calling. It is imperative you know at all times what is going on, and be able at the same time to teach effectively. Eyes forever lowered don't help. I have seen teachers so absorbed in their book they have failed to see raised hands, and seen, too, the consequent feeling of frustration on a child's face when he cannot get the teacher to look at him and have his perfectly legitimate question answered. I have seen teachers so concerned with the next question that they fail to listen to the answer for the previous one, and thus students say what is incorrect and are not made aware of their error. Experience and time are of course the solution to these difficulties, but from the very beginning of his career the teacher must be conscious of such difficulties and strive to overcome them.

This getting to know your class is of paramount importance. I always seat mine alphabetically at the first meeting so that I can learn their names more quickly. But more than that one must know who is trying yet having a hard time, and who although able enough is cutting corners and seeking the teacher's sympathy. The former should be encouraged, helped along when he answers hesitantly and inaccurately. But the latter should be given rough treatment until he is willing to do his part, to work rather than bluff his way through the course. It does of course take years of experience to distinguish the one who can't from the one who won't, but it is a talent that makes the superior classroom teacher. It is important to congratulate when the boy or girl who has been struggling does well, as it is important to "chew out" the lazy and inattentive.

There are two intangibles for which I always look and which, in my judgment, constitute the dividing line between the adequate teacher and the superior. I have repeatedly said that whatever breaks the magic currents of the well-run class should at all costs be avoided. A language class must be alive and keep moving. The importance of timing—when to pause over something and when to speed on lest student interest sag, the times when the class seems listless and distracted and needs jacking up and those when the children are tired and need a breather—is in teaching as in acting an elusive and intangible quality. These two professions have so many points in common that I like to urge my fledgling teachers to imagine themselves on stage, sometimes with an appreciative audience and all too often not! And so in this art of making a classroom situation come alive, humor need play an important role. I cannot subscribe to the idea that what is serious and important, learning, must by definition be sober and severe. To me, a good classroom is gay and there is laughter, not too much and at all times under control so that the class never gets out of hand or simply silly and giggly. But the young, as well as the not so young, respond to jokes or quips, and often remember more easily what can be associated with an amusing incident. I have found that the type of humor which liter-

ally rolled my grade three foreign language elementary school classes in the aisle also amuses my sophisticated high school sophomores and juniors, that "corn" and puns appeal to all ages. In fact, when a class can "see" a joke or appreciate a pun, it feels and so do you that they are really beginning to understand the language.

Having given this list of do's and don't's I should like now to turn to some of the techniques which will help the inexperienced especially in classes in which the native tongue is either banished or reduced to a minimum, classes in which the primary aim is to get the taught to think in the target language. Again, what I have to say can be found in many books and articles about modern language teaching, but I still think there is no harm putting them together for reference or review. That these pointers are so often honored in the breech convinces me that this review is worthwhile. Here is a list, then, which, at least in my own case, has made it easier for me to get my classes to speak in the target language and correctly:

1. Examples before the rule. We work long and hard on various basic grammatical concepts such as the position of the personal pronoun, the handling of the negative, etc., without giving them any rule. When the inevitable "why?" is asked I answer them, but do not expect them to know that why until the concept itself has become automatic.

2. Never give the incorrect form. I have heard teachers ask if one should say "je suis allé" or "j'ai allé." It is bad psychologically for the teacher ever to use purposely the second language incorrectly. And for some strange reason the class is more apt to retain the wrong form than the right, when it has heard the teacher use it.

3. Correct each error as it arises. If you are drilling a certain point and in his sentence the student, while getting that point, makes another error, it should be pointed out to him then and there, and if serious should be drilled. Otherwise, the wrong form will be lodged in his memory becoming harder and harder to eradicate.

4. If a word is not understood, one example is rarely enough. To make sure they know what it means and how it is used, it is wise to multiply your examples.

5. There must be a reason for what you do. I have heard teachers ask questions which have no apparent objective. For example two or three "what color is the . . . ?" which reveals that the class, at least on that particular day, knows its colors perfectly. Why go on, then? Is it because you had planned twenty-five color questions before class and can't change?

6. Remember the importance of review. Colors may be well in hand on Monday, but by Friday you better ask again to make sure they have been retained. As the patterns get more and more complex, and more and more is expected of them, a brief review especially of what has been most difficult should be held each day.

7. A student makes a mistake. You correct it or have another student do so. You should then go back to the first offender and see that he is able to repeat the correct form. There should be an advantage gained from every error.

8. When you explain a new word do it within the limits of the vocabulary they already know. I have seen many teachers explain with more words that require explanation so that nearly an entire period is necessary to answer the original question. An example that struck me was the expression 'des olives pourries". (This was in an excellent second-year class.) The teacher must have looked it up in his Larousse for he offered "gâtées," "corrumpues," "en putréfaction," and "détiorées," none of which the class understood. He afterwards confessed he had never thought of "mauvaises" or "immangeables!"

9. Accept a correct answer even if it is not the one expected. I know one child was heartbroken when he suggested "Lusitania" as an example of a *naufrage* only to be told, no, Titanic! If any student of mine had ever heard of the Lusitania I would have shouted "Halleluiah!"

10. Don't explain a new word by others of the same family. A child asked for the meaning of "féliciter" and was told it meant "donner des félicitations." Any further comment necessary?

11. And avoid the esoteric. A second-year class was reading a story in which appeared the word "briquets." From the context it was quite obvious what they were as they were barking. The teacher quite rightly informed the class they were a form of dog, then went on to cigarette lighters, and finally to some technical use of

the word she had found in Larousse, thereby at least enriching the vocabulary of her master teacher.

12. Avoid yes-or-no questions. I see little value in asking a series of them when the element of guessing correctly is so high and the test of true knowledge so dubious.

13. If a student gives the correct answer in so far as the words are concerned, but articulates so badly that it does not satisfy the criterion of "readily understandable to the educated native who knows no English" I claim the answer is not correct and should not be accepted until there is improved pronunciation. We cannot in such instances accept the half loaf.

14. Chorus responses are fine but only if you pick out errors. I hear individuals, from my post in the rear of the room, say something quite wrong, without realizing it or having it brought to their attention. It is bad pedagogy indeed to do things which have no value; it is worse to do things which reinforce what is incorrect.

15. In pattern drills don't mix two difficult concepts at the start. You wish your class to transpose from present to past. Fine. But don't give them sentences which also involve the substitution of pronouns for nouns. Be sure they are letter perfect in each category separately before the two are joined. One cannot go too slowly at the start.

16. Culture. You will hear a great deal about this much abused word. To me, it means that when learning a second language the child is learning something of the people who speak it. In the first few months of study, there is no need to go into the Molières and the Dürers and the Verdis which form so much of the glory of their respective civilizations, but what comes up that is different from what they know and typical of the foreign culture should be explained. There was mention somewhere, in a French story, of a hotel with "eau chaude à toute heure" a statement which the class simply and for good cause could not understand. But the teacher said nothing to help them beyond making sure they could give the contrary of "chaude" and a synonym for "à toute heure." I think that particular group must still be perplexed.

17. And finally my pet aversion: "Vous avez compris cela?" How often have I heard that, sometimes almost at a scream, when a teacher has obviously failed to explain something difficult. The children invariably answer "oui" for that is obviously, often all too obviously, what is expected of them, but their faces are perfect illustrations of "non." I much prefer the teacher who gives up and goes on to something else with every one aware that the word is not yet understood and must be dealt with later than the endless reiterations of that most offensive of rhetorical questions.

In conclusion, the above suggestions in themselves will not ensure the sort of language teaching we must have if we are going to compete in this area with those countries with a longer tradition of school-inspired bilingualism. But they will certainly help, as they have helped so many with whom I have worked. And without them . . . I have seen too often the sorry results. Remember, careful, thorough preparation before you enter the classroom is essential. Don't try to bluff. When you don't know something, be honest about it and you will gain that necessary and very precious thing, the respect of your students. Take a long hard look at your testing, for tests reveal not only what the class does not know but also what you have failed to teach them! At the beginning of each year, state clearly but emphatically your ground rules, how the course is to be run, what you expect, why you are going to insist on certain things. If it is known in advance of what your aims and objectives consist and by what method you plan to obtain them, if it is made clear that you are calling the shots and are going to insist on certain standards of conduct, attention and performance, then you can work with your class as a team, a subtle but highly desirable relationship which makes for an agreeable and also productive atmosphere.

If the above observations have any effect, I will be most grateful, for I am striving for nothing more than the best possible teaching in an area which far too long has been neglected in this country, an area which is of such great importance today that our Congress has voted millions of dollars for improving, extending and enriching it. Besides the many other rewards for success in the language classroom, there is now

that of serving one's country. How far the wheel has turned in the years since the abolition of the old-fashioned College Boards! How different foreign language teaching today from the year I began French, in Grade VIII! I still remember our teacher saying there was only one thing he expected us to learn that term, and if we learned it our reward would be an honor grade. We were to rattle off fifteen verb forms, which I later discovered were the past participles, in verse form, of the fifteen verbs normally conjugated with *être*. I hadn't the faintest idea of why I was learning them, but because my delivery was so rapid I began my learning of French with a most undeserved and ridiculous "A plus." Fortunately I have seen nothing like that in recent years and trust I never will! But my experience, believe it or not, is all too tragically the truth.

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